

## **The Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women**

Springfield Public Hearing  
January 17, 2007, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.  
YWCA of Western Massachusetts

### **Hearing Minutes**

**Attendees:** Mary Reardon Johnson, Candice Lopes, Gloria Torres, Kathleen Coney Norbet, Kateri Walsh

**Commissioners:** Linda Cavaoli, Cathy Greene, Susana Segat

**Staff:** Jill Ashton, Linda Brantley

#### **Welcome**

Executive Director Brantley welcomed the attendees and provided a brief overview of the Commission's work on pay equity. She noted that the Commission will document the testimonies given and report the findings to the legislature and other interested organizations.

Executive Director Brantley briefly reviewed recently filled legislation that addresses the issue of pay inequities in Massachusetts and noted that the hearings will help establish a baseline of information and a foundation upon which to move public policy forward. In addition, the Commission has formed the Massachusetts Coalition for Women's Wage Equality, which has developed a multi-faceted approach to the issue, incorporating legislative advocacy, public and media outreach and research.

Executive Director Brantley urged those present to join with the Coalition in order to work toward pay equity for daughters and granddaughters.

Commissioner Segat began the introductions. She welcomed the group, introduced her fellow commissioners - past and present, including current city council president Kateri Walsh, and Mary Reardon Johnson and asked attendees to give their names.

#### **Testimony**

**Candice Lopes** began by saying that issues of pay equity are tied to education. She noted that more than 70% of students in the Springfield schools are receiving free or reduced lunch. The economic status of families is often an indicator of the children's future ability to become self-sufficient. Furthermore she stated, that a women's future earnings are decided early based on the career path she chooses. Ms. Lopes noted the separation of sexes into traditional roles, men in shop class and women in home economics.

**Mary Reardon Johnson** remarked that the Commission should look at pay inequities suffered by state contracted workers. She cited cafeteria workers who lost their state retirement and suffered diminished health care because the state chose to privatize.

Commissioner Segat responded that there should also be a review of managing state payroll costs by keeping employees under the 19 hour cut off. In response to Ms.

Lopes, she urged equal appreciation of women's work, stating "what is more important than caring for our children, and why does it pay so much less than caring for our cars?"

Ms. Lopes further noted that Springfield is rich in well paying manufacturing jobs, but women lack the proper training and efforts to get them to go to Connecticut to receive the training they need have been unsuccessful.

**Kathleen Coney Norbut** began her testimony by saying that the YWCA has always been revolutionary in securing and protecting women's rights; she noted her appreciation of their ongoing work. Ms. Norbut said that she first became aware of pay inequities in the 1970s and she was inspired by the momentum of the women's movement to be part of the change. However, she is extremely discouraged to know that the progress has been slow and at currently stagnant. Regardless, she is proud to work with elected officials and legislators to renew the efforts to effect change. Ms. Norbut said that she feels compelled to speak out for her self and for the women who, because of overwhelming responsibilities in their lives, are unable to speak for themselves.

Ms. Norbut noted the open seats in the room and said that it was not because the issue is unimportant one, but rather because women are living in poverty and are unable to be at the hearing. She cited a multitude of factors by which women are challenged, including: limited access to education, economic hardship, and family violence. Ms. Norbut stressed the interconnectedness of the issues which women and their families face: women suffering from low incomes do not have the privilege of free time to attend a hearing on pay equity; children who live in a violent family do significantly less well in school and are ultimately limited in their careers. She noted that an increase in the minimum wage and pay equity are family issues which should be supported.

Ms. Norbut continued by speaking about women and education, noting that the wage gap between equally educated men and women increases with each step on the educational ladder. On the other end of the spectrum, she noted that she knew a low-income woman who wanted to work, but needed the benefits, particularly health care for her children, that welfare allotted her. Ms. Norbut railed against the injustices women face throughout the economic spectrum, stating "the lower end is paralyzing and the upper end is disgusting." She concluded by noting that indeed there were a number of social and economic issues that deserved attention, "but right now we should fix what we can and fix what we should."

**Gloria Torres** spoke of her hope that the momentum being generated around the issue of pay equity will translate into real change for women. She noted that, unfortunately, people are easily discouraged and that there needs to be a strong coalition of women who are committed to the issue regardless of how long it takes to win wage equality. Ms. Torres noted that it was a fight not only for ourselves, but also for our children.

Ms. Johnson testified about the physical location of Springfield, noting that Interstate 91 drains workers from Massachusetts and that land mass inhibits attendees at hearings.

### **Next steps**

Executive Director Brantley informed attendees of the many ways which the MCSW will communicate about the issue of pay inequities and the struggle towards wage equality, including outreach to media, action alerts to partners, and distribution of a newsletter to member lists. She noted that the MCSW is committed to communicating the significance of the issue of wage inequities to the general population and to foster a conversation about how to address the problem.

Executive Director Brantley informed the group that minutes were taken and would be circulated. In addition, written testimony will also be accepted. She informed the attendees of the work of the Massachusetts Coalition on Women's Wage Equality, including advocacy trainings, Equal Pay Day observation, legislation, research, and wage initiatives, and encouraged them to join with the Coalition.

### **Adjourn**

The hearing was adjourned at 7:00